

University of Texas – Rio Grande Valley

Submitter: Veronica Gonzales, Vice-President of Governmental & Community Relations

The Committee seeks the following information related to the COVID-19 pandemic:

- 1. Are institutions of higher education ensuring the health and safety of students, faculty and staff during the 2020 Fall Semester? When applicable, please speak directly to classroom and lab settings, dormitories and dining halls.**

The health and safety of UTRGV students and our campus community is the top priority in every decision made as we go into the Fall 2020 semester. UTRGV is taking numerous measures to ensure the health and safety of students, faculty and staff, including but not limited to:

Screening & Testing: All students, faculty and staff are required to self-screen each day before coming onto campus. A protocol was developed and shared with the campus community that details the symptoms to screen for, and other situations that would require the person to stay home and not come onto campus. The protocol also notifies students, faculty and staff to fill out a COVID-19 Screening Form if they become symptomatic. Free phone screenings are also available to students via Student Health. A COVID-19 Response Team, coordinated through UT Health RGV (the clinical practice arm of UTRGV's School of Medicine) will determine if a COVID-19 test is needed and if so, one will be provided by UT Health RGV, at no out-of-pocket cost to the student or employee, with results available within 48 hours. Contract tracing of all positive individuals will also be conducted by UT Health RGV personnel.

Instruction: UTRGV is offering course instruction via several different modalities, including online asynchronous, online synchronous, hybrid/reduced seating classes that combine online delivery and in-person class instruction, traditional face-to-face classes, accelerated online programs for graduate school classes and interactive video classes that are administered via live feed and combine aspects of online synchronous and traditional face-to-face modalities.

Class Seating: For classes that will have in-person instruction, seating is spaced out so as to comply with CDC guidelines.

Face Covering required: Anyone coming onto campus is required to wear a face covering. A face covering protocol was implemented, messaging has been posted throughout campus and on the university website, training has been made available and emails were sent to all UTRGV students, staff and faculty with the protocol. If a person coming to campus does not have a face covering, one will be provided.

Campus Housing: Move In: Move ins are scheduled by appointment with a maximum of 10 residents scheduled every hour. Curbside check-in allows for document collection and distribution of keys. A limit of two adults can assist the resident with the move-in. Elevator access is limited to family groups or one person per elevator. **Facility Management:** In addition to a de-densification model of assigning one person per room, Campus Housing requires all residents and employees to adhere to UTRGV mask protocol. Common and communal spaces have been reduced or have limited occupancy including seating in common areas, laundry rooms, elevators and no access to game rooms. Increased cleaning and sanitization practices include frequent cleaning of high touch surfaces, cleaning schedules are

increased from 5 to 7 days/week and employees are trained on appropriate cleaning protocols. Signage with preventative strategies (i.e. wash hands, social distance, COVID-19 symptoms for self-health screening, etc.) is displayed in common areas. **Infection Protocol:** The department will follow UTRGV protocol for students and employees who are symptomatic or have had direct exposure. UTRGV has reserved COVID-19 accommodations in both Brownsville and Edinburg for those that are self-monitoring (awaiting testing) or who have tested positive. For those rare occasions where a resident has a roommate – for instance, married couples living in a campus apartment – if the roommate or a close contact tests positive for COVID-19, the resident may be required to relocate and/or self-isolate in accordance with University directives at a location designated by University Housing. Students will be allowed to re-enter their assigned housing facility once all self-isolation protocols established by the University have been achieved.

Labs: Instructional labs requiring hands-on activities will have significantly reduced capacity. Hybrid instruction will allow for the rotation of student groups/alternating weeks without the need to break the lab into multiple sections. Instruction, team-based learning and data analysis will be conducted online while only the hands-on part will be provided face-to-face. Face coverings and gloves will be required inside all labs and lab personnel using common equipment are required to disinfect the equipment after each use. All persons entering the lab will be required to wash their hands. Signage is posted throughout the labs and buildings to enforce the message of face coverings, social distancing requirements and frequent hand washing being required. Enhanced sanitization is conducted by custodial services in all public spaces each evening.

Campus Dining: Because the majority of courses offered during the Fall semester will be via online instruction, seated dining services will be limited. The dining hall will only offer take-out service; no seating. The Student Union in Edinburg and its equivalent, *El Comedor* in Brownsville, have reduced seating capacity allowing for 6 feet of physical distancing. Students will be required to wear a mask until such time as they eat. Plexiglass barriers are installed at cashiering stations and markers are placed on the floor to assure those placing orders adhere to social distancing. All employees are required to follow “Dining Services Policy on Employee COVID-19 Safety Measures”, which mandates that employees self-monitor for signs and symptoms of COVID-19 daily before arriving at work, that they wear a mask and, when appropriate, gloves, and that they frequently wash their hands. Housekeeping practices have been enhanced, including increased routine cleaning and disinfecting of high touch areas, work surfaces, equipment, tools and machinery, delivery vehicles and areas in the work environment, including restrooms, meeting rooms, checkout stations, and drop-off and pick-up locations. Additionally, Dining Services has implemented a thorough contact tracing process for management and/or Sodexo Human Resources to use when an employee has COVID-19 symptoms or a COVID-19 diagnosis.

Transportation - Parking and Transportation Services (PTS) provides critical support to the UTRGV community’s mobility needs. In addition, Vaquero Express operates as a public transit provider and must continue to operate in that capacity. When in operation, the service will be free and available to the general public. Operations will be activated to a level that is consistent to the demands of the academic mission of the University and student travel patterns. Service will operate only with stringent safety controls in place at all times. Staff and customers will maintain social distancing—a minimum of six feet will remain at all times between persons. PTS staff must be present at every trip departure to ensure that social distancing is maintained. The ground will be marked with the appropriate distance to guide passengers. Face coverings must be worn at all times when in the presence of others. To mitigate the

spread of germs, supervisors will schedule two three-minute handwashing breaks for shifts less than four hours and four three-minute hand washing breaks for anything greater than four hours. Hand sanitation stations will be placed at the entrance of each office or bus for use by employees and customers. High Touchable Surfaces (HTS) must be sanitized multiple times throughout the workday. Every transit vehicle's HTS will be cleaned during the lunch hour or midday and after the last trip in daily service with the use of a fogger or other high-volume application device in conjunction with more-concentrated spot cleanings for HTS. Staff will be stationed at every bus stop to assist the driver to wipe down HTS during the midday sessions.

Enhanced Cleaning: Enhanced cleaning procedures have been added to frequently disinfect high touch areas. Hand-sanitizer machines have also been installed throughout campus buildings.

3. What plans are in place for on-campus COVID-19 testing? Do institutions have the capacity to provide testing on campus, both in terms of available supplies and labs to process tests?

As noted above, UT Health RGV, the clinical practice arm of the UTRGV School of Medicine, is available to provide testing to students, faculty and staff on campus in Edinburg, Harlingen and Brownsville. UT Health has available supplies and a lab that can process tests, with results available in 24-48 hours. Contact tracing is also conducted by UTRGV's COVID-19 response team.

4. If applicable, what are plans for collegiate athletics this Fall? How will student athletes be kept safe? If fans will be permitted to attend events, how will fans be kept safe?

The Western Athletic Conference and UTRGV have cancelled Fall sports for 2020. This semester, we will welcome back to campus all student athletes that feel comfortable returning to the University. We are following CDC and NCAA guidelines to ensure health and safety for our student athletes. Upon their return, all student athletes will self-isolate prior to COVID testing. Once cleared, we will adhere to NCAA testing guidelines throughout the fall semester which will require approximately 2500 tests between August and December. Testing will be performed by the UTRGV School of Medicine. Once cleared by our team physician, Dr. Jimmy Gonzales, UTRGV student athletes will be allowed to participate in practice, weight training and have controlled access to our athletic facilities. Face coverings will be required at all times by coaches and staff. Student athletes will have the same requirement with the exception of practice times during on-field/court instruction during strenuous activity.

Since fall sports are cancelled, UTRGV Athletics is now focused on planning for the 2020-21 men's and women's basketball season. At this point, both seasons are scheduled to start on time in mid-November. As for permitting fans to attend our home events, we have several models prepared to accommodate our supporters. The models include 50% capacity, 25% capacity and no fans in the stands. We will continue to monitor local and state mandates to determine what is permissible and safest for our student-athletes, coaches and the community.

5. What do projected enrollment figures and formula funding look like for institutions for this school year?

UTRGV is cautiously optimistic that our students will continue with their education and enrollment levels hold over this Academic Year. The formula funding levels for this school year were decided during the prior legislative session. Enrollments from this current base period will determine formula funding allocations for this next biennium (FY's 2022-23).

6. Has there been a noticeable impact on staff or faculty retention with regard to concerns about the pandemic?

Fortunately, no. Over a period of several months, UTRGV sought input from faculty on teaching modalities, and asked faculty and staff members to participate in task force groups that designed protocols associated with returning to campus. The protocols developed were based on exhaustive discussions with our academic leaders, including our infectious disease experts at the School of Medicine. Each faculty member was allowed to design their courses in one of four modalities based on safety and success. Those who elected to have a campus component worked with our infectious disease committee to design an experience that adheres to CDC guidelines. Additionally, for both faculty and staff, we developed a robust training campaign that ensures our campus community is educated and aware of best practices so that each is responsible for keeping themselves and each other safe. We have also given flexibility to division leads and supervisors to return staff back to campus gradually and safely, including allowing those who can or need to work from home to continue to do so. Employees who need to take sick leave or expanded Family Medical Leave for specified reasons related to COVID-19 are instructed to work with their supervisors and the university's Human Resource Department who will assist them with the leave process.

7. Health Related Institutions were exempt from the 5% budget cuts earlier this year, due to their important role in resolving the public health crisis. What are some of the programs, research, and responses to the pandemic that our Health-Related Institutions have contributed?

COVID-19 Testing, Patient Communication Center and Clinical Laboratory

UT Health RGV, the clinical arm of UTRGV's School of Medicine has led the way in COVID-19 testing in the Rio Grande Valley. Testing is a critical piece to combatting the spread of COVID-19 and UTRGV was fortunate to have a team of researchers who were already doing work on vector-borne diseases and who quickly converted their lab into a CLIA certified clinical laboratory for COVID-19 testing. They did this in response to the long wait times that our region was experiencing to receive test results back. Four testing sites were set up in Harlingen, Brownsville, Mercedes and Edinburg and UT Health RGV partnered with hospitals and other testing sites across the Valley to serve as their reference laboratory. UT Health RGV staff, including UTRGV graduate students, run 2 shifts a day, 7 days a week in the lab. As of August 23, 2020, UT Health RGV's clinical laboratory had tested 50,012 samples for COVID-19 with an average turnaround time of 24 hours for results. Of this total, 21,097 samples were collected from UT Health RGV's four drive-thru testing sites in the Rio Grande Valley.

Additionally, UT Health RGV established a COVID-19 screening center as an extension of its Patient Communications Center (PCC) normally used for clinical appointments. Approximately 30 full-time employees were assigned to the PCC daily. A combination of PCC employees, including student workers, and a number of UTRGV volunteers manage thousands of calls and online inquiries daily for COVID-19

testing. Individuals requesting testing are not required to pay any out-of-pocket costs; both insured and uninsured are permitted to receive testing. On average, the daily volume has been 1,000 inquiries for a total of over 200,000 calls/forms received as of August 23rd.

UTRGV also purchased equipment to increase the number of PCR samples that can be analyzed and the lab has gone from testing 150 samples a day in April/May to being able to analyze 1,200/day and the capacity continues to grow. UTRGV's School of Medicine also contracted with the Department of State Health Services (DSHS) for contact tracing. 191 contact tracers, investigators and epidemiology leads have been hired to help with state efforts to stop the spread of COVID-19, with the goal being to hire a total of 200 contact tracers.

Telemedicine

In April, 2020, UT Health RGV launched telemedicine capacity across its 25 clinical sites to improve access to healthcare across the region. Services are targeted to the entire population of the Rio Grande Valley who seek primary and specialty care services. From April until August 23rd, there have been 5,262 telemedicine encounters with UT Health RGV providers.

Manufacturing of PPE

On the General Academics side, UTRGV's engineering and theatre departments teamed up together to make Personal Protective Equipment for UT Health RGV employees working the testing sites, as well as surrounding clinics and hospitals in need. The Engineering Department 3D printed face shield frames and the Theatre Department added the protective transparent shield and sewed face masks and gowns. To date, they have made 969 Face Shields, 589 plastic gowns and 1,000 face masks.

8. How have state and federal COVID-related funds already impacted budgets? (Michael Mueller and Michael Patriarca)

The student allocation of CARES funding was used to provide aid to students who experienced financial challenges related to the disruption of campus operations due to the coronavirus and significant changes in the delivery of instruction. The institutional allocation of the CARES Act funding has helped offset some operational revenue in FY'20 as direct result of the COVID-19 pandemic. However, these one-time funds are insufficient to offset any permanent loss of funding as a direct result of the 5% reduction in state general revenue. Additionally, the medical school has only received \$913,335.25 in CARES funding (provider relief funding and reimbursement from CMS for testing and treatment of some uninsured individuals) which is far less than what it has spent to provide COVID-19 testing and build lab capabilities to analyze tests and turnaround results in 24-48 hours.

8. How has the pandemic affected the overall financial status of small and rural community colleges?

N/A
